

23th July 2023

**Councillor John Cotton
Leader of Birmingham City Council
Council House
Victoria Square
Birmingham
B1 1BB**

Dear Councillor John Cotton

Ladywood Regeneration Project Consultation Process

Thank you for your letter of 19 July in relation to the Ladywood regeneration project. I was delighted by your swift response. I am also very happy to hear that you intend to be transparent in everything you do which is very reassuring and certainly has not been the case so far, quite the opposite.

Also, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your apology in the Birmingham Mail 22 July. Let's hope that "lessons have been learnt". It was a shame that your sentiments were not shared during the BBC Radio WM interview on the morning following the meeting at Ladywood Community Centre. Pointing the finger of blame during the interview at the residents was very hurtful demonstrating a total lack of empathy, care or consideration for the people of Central Ladywood.

I would also like to thank you for forwarding me the 2019 consultation leaflets. However, there are legalities of the consultation process that I believe need further consideration from the perspective of private owners and that of the residents of the Council-built areas.

The first consultation leaflet for Council-built properties was published 2019 and the last December 2019. Since then the residents of Central Ladywood have had no correspondence in relation to consultation until a letter from our councillors 19 June 2023.

In the consultation leaflet June 2019 there was an invitation for residents of the 'Council-built areas of Central Ladywood' to join the Steering Group and participate in the consultation. Please note that private housing estates, such as, Ashton Croft, Bellcroft and Knoll Croft are not Council-built and therefore there was no provision made for residents of these housing estates to be involved in either the consultation nor the Steering Group. In addition, as stated in this leaflet the three Housing Associations in the area would link up with their residents. In relation to the residents of the Council-built areas the leaflet stated in bold:

We cannot do this alone. You know your area better than anyone, So, we've insisted that regeneration is led by Central Ladywood Residents and their Councillors

The consultation leaflet of August 2019 invites Council-built residents to the first meeting in the early Autumn states:

Thank you for coming forward to influence improvement to Council-built homes, communal areas and the environment in Central Ladywood and to advise on new homes

In the October 2019 consultation leaflet it states:

....the Council has not yet appointed a person to work for and together with us all to ensure proper engagement in developing the plans and to support the Steering Group. We want the consultation to be full and open to the residents of Central Ladywood – so, we should wait for the person to be in place and not rush into things. Once the Steering Group has met, we will set up workshops and organise visits to regenerated neighbourhoods around the country to help us all to work out what we want

The October 2019 leaflet sets out the 8 agreed principles that the partners have started working on. Stating you may well see the short-listed applicants around the neighbourhood. The leaflet states:

We will appoint the partner who puts forward a plan that best reflects the principles and shows the clearest understanding of the Central Ladywood Community [the underlined section is in bold in this leaflet]

In December 2019 the consultation leaflet states that Central Ladywood Regeneration community organiser job description has been drafted stating

we will make sure that the person appointed knows what we expect of him/her. The organiser will probably start on 1-2 days a week, building to full time with a team as consultations, workshops, exhibitions, visits, a CLR newsletter etc come on stream.

In this newsletter we get a reminder of the 8 principles. You will note that 7 and 8 are now in bold on this leaflet:

1. To secure high quality, sustainable new homes as part of a well-designed neighbourhood;
2. To provide a safe and attractive network of connected public open spaces and pedestrian routes;
3. To create a new local centre with facilities and amenities to serve the local community;
4. To enable the enhancement of the canal through improved access and greater levels of utility and interface with development;
5. To create improved connections across the Middleway including boulevarding;
6. To create a complementary mix of commercial and other uses to support a vibrant active neighbourhood;
- 7. New, high quality social housing;**
- 8. Ensuring that the existing community is retained and involved in the development of the new neighbourhood.**

The leaflet concludes that ***So, please be patient. It'll all be worth it in the end.***

In December 2019 we received Central Ladywood Christmas Labour Newsletter. News from Labour in the Ladywood Ward titled Regenerate Central Ladywood.

.....residents and local councillors will start to plan and decide how we will improve your neighbourhood.....big issues such as upgrading homes, building new homes.....

In this Christmas Newsletter, there was a reminder of the 8 principles to guide the regeneration and again principles 7 and 8 are in bold. In relation to the 8 principles the newsletter states:

We must see to it that we stick to these aims and that we get the best for Central Ladywood. It will take time. We want to get it right and to make Central Ladywood the best resident-led regeneration in the country

This newsletter also encourages all to vote for Labour on the 12 December 2019.

Our collective has grown tenfold over the past week. In relation to the legalities and the ethics of the consultation process there are many queries:

1. Firstly, the private housing estates of Ashton Croft, Bellcroft and Knoll Croft have not been invited and as such have not been involved in the consultation process. The first we knew was through being presented with a map of the area with a red line around it from following up on press speculation about regeneration in Central Ladywood towards the end of June 2023. Surely this is illegal.

2. I have carefully read through the consultation leaflets of 2019. I cannot understand when and how the commencement of the compulsory purchase process was approved, which could lead to the possible displacement of up to 5000 people and mass CPO 2025 - including private homes which have had no consultation or any inkling that regeneration would impact on them whatsoever?
3. Moving on, what has Labour done to ensure that **Central Ladywood the best resident-led regeneration in the country?** After all this was stated in their Christmas Newsletter before voting took place on 12 December? It became very evident that this was not the case at the meeting on Thursday 20 July and quite the opposite which was reported on extensively through local radio, TV and newspapers.
4. With regard to the consultation process for the Council-built properties as outlined in the 2019 leaflets:
 - a. Did the council make the appointment of a person to support the Steering Group as mentioned October 2019?
 - b. Did the Steering Group meet? There was plenty of interest. The first meeting was planned Autumn 2019? If so please would you forward me the agendas and minutes of the meetings
 - c. Did visits take place involving residents to other regeneration areas? If so what were the outcomes?
 - d. How did the above inform the decisions made in the Report to Cabinet 27 June 2023?
5. Out of 7500 new properties around 11% will be social housing and in the region of 5% affordable housing. Highlighted in the 2019 leaflets is principle 7 **New, high quality social housing**. Why is Birmingham City Council, a Labour controlled council, not meeting its own target for social and affordable housing?
6. During the procurement stage two developers pulled out leaving one. Once the competitive element was removed this could potentially undermine the benefits of the project. Why was this the case and what impact did this have on the 8 principles and processes and procedures outlined in the 2019 consultation information? What strategies did Birmingham City Council put in to ensure that only having one applicant would not be to the detriment of the residents in the local community? How were the private housing estates decided to be drawn in the red line?
7. As part of the procurement process St Joseph Homes Ltd were required to produce an indicative Masterplan. Surely this should have been part of the consultation process, thus putting residents at the centre of decision-making processes? Why has this not been made available?
8. In the Report to Cabinet 27 July 2023 there is no mention of the 8 principles. Surely these are fundamental and the backbone to the whole project?
9. As mentioned at the residents meeting on Thursday 20 July by the developers and 3.2.13 of the Report to Cabinet that St Joseph Homes Ltd will commit significant investment into improved social infrastructure including two new schools. The usual direction for the building of new schools is through a free school application process for which the DfE would fund the costs and assist with the design of the school. The impression given on Thursday evening is that St Joseph Homes Ltd would fund the costing for these schools. Please could you clarify precisely who will fund the building of these two schools?

In relation to Principle 8 **Ensuring that the existing community is retained and involved in the development of the new neighbourhood** I respectfully request a roundtable meeting with yourself, our local councillors and MP and representatives of St Joseph.

I look forward to a swift response within five working days.

Yours sincerely

George Smith